

The purpose of this publication is to spread the truth, to sow God's good seed, the Word of God, and to confront religious error for the good of men's souls. Editor: Allen Dvorak

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“went down to his house justified, rather than the other” (v. 14). Yinger argued that the Pharisee was perhaps merely expressing his gratitude for the divine grace received rather than reflecting legalistic self-righteousness. According to *covenantal nomism*, that is exactly what the Jew under the Law was supposed to do – express his gratitude for salvation by keeping the Law. If both men recognized their need for divine grace, why did Jesus not indicate that both men were justified? According to the view that rejects Pharisaical legalism, the Pharisee said nothing that could be criticized! Supposedly he merely expressed gratitude for the grace he had received and noted his obedience in response to that grace. Yet Jesus clearly implied that the Pharisee had “exalted himself” (v. 14b).

Finally, we need to remember that Jesus was telling a parable, not relating an actual event. He could choose whomever he wanted to include in His illustration. Why choose to use a Pharisee and present him as “trusting in himself,” if the Pharisees in general were not pursuing a righteousness of their own? Even Yinger sees the difficulty here:

However, if first-century Judaism was not characterized by this self-righteous boasting in merits, what becomes of our interpretation of this parable? Maybe Jesus picked an

atypical Pharisee for this story...But that's not how parables usually operate. The main elements and characters are drawn from common experience. Otherwise, the surprise in the parable doesn't quite work. It arrests the hearers' attention precisely because they assume that Pharisees were among the righteous ones (“justified”) and not the despised tax collectors. No, this Pharisee must be typical of most.²

The words of the Pharisee sound like boasting. Yet we do not have any reason to boast; we have failed miserably in our efforts to justify ourselves and must depend upon the mercy of God, extended upon the fulfillment of stipulated conditions. We must humble ourselves as did the despised tax collector and seek the divine mercy.

¹ Kent L. Yinger, *The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011. P. 13 (Kindle Edition).

² *Ibid.*

[Editor's Note: This article, in abbreviated form, first appeared in *Biblical Insights*, May, 2014]

Bible Challenge Question - Answer

Paul named Hymenaeus and Alexander as individuals who had “made shipwreck of their faith” (1 Timothy 1:19-20). The apostle indicated that he had “handed [them] over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”



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In Need of Mercy

By Allen Dvorak

“Two men went up into the temple to pray...”

So begins one of the best-known parables told by Jesus, one featuring a Pharisee and a tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). Although the parable is brief, it presents a contrast that would have been stark to the Jewish mind and conveys a powerful lesson about grace. The parable in its entirety and its introduction by Luke reads as follows:

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the

one who humbles himself will be exalted.”
(Luke 18:9-14; ESV)

Jesus pictured these two men who prayed in the temple in eyesight of each other. Both the NKJV and the NASB translate that the Pharisee prayed to himself (v. 11; in the Greek text, word order does not indicate that either translation, ESV or NKJV, is more likely than the other) and began by thanking God that he was not like other men, mentioning extortioners, the unjust and adulterers, and even the tax collector. He continued by mentioning his perseverance in fasting and tithing. In contrast, the tax collector assumed a position of humility and petitioned God for mercy, identifying himself as a sinner (v. 13).

Jesus probably wished for those hearing the parable to visualize the Pharisee according to the common ostentatiousness of the Pharisees that He described on another occasion (Matthew 23:5-7). No observer would have missed the “signs of spirituality,” i.e., his broad phylactery and the long fringes on his prayer shawl. The words of the [Continued on page 3]

Zedekiah: Profile in Cowardice

By Allen Dvorak



Zedekiah:
example of the _____ - _____ man.

Zedekiah (also called _____) was a _____ king.

Zedekiah made an oath of allegiance to _____.

Jeremiah's message to Zedekiah in the beginning of his reign:

Later the message would be (Jer. 21:8-9):
_____ and _____ or _____ and _____!

Applications:

1. It is futile to study God's word if _____.

2. Obeying the Lord requires _____.

3. The word of the Lord is not _____.

Zedekiah's fate: _____

But be _____ of the word, and not _____ only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a _____ of the word and not a _____, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a _____. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once _____ what he was like. -- James 1: _____; ESV

"A person with a clear purpose will make progress on even the roughest road."

-- Thomas Carlyle

"The human being is flesh and consciousness, body and soul; his heart is an abyss which can only be filled by that which is godly."

-- Olivier Messiaen

words of the Pharisee, as he prayed, emphasized his own efforts to achieve righteousness.

There are some, however, who would suggest that such an understanding of this parable is incorrect. The argument is made that first-century Judaism (also referred to as "Second Temple Judaism") was not a legalistic religion in its outlook, but was instead characterized by *covenantal nomism* (the recognition that salvation was by divine grace which consequently obligated men to follow the laws of the covenant). According to the view of covenantal nomism, first century Jews recognized that they were saved by God's grace and that gratitude for that salvation was manifested by their obedience to the Mosaic Law.

In his *Introduction to the New Paul Perspective* (often designated NPP), Kent Yinger commented on this parable as follows:

Could it be that our view of this Pharisee needs adjustment? He does not boast in self-achieved goodness, but thanks God that he does not walk in sin (v. 11). If so inclined,

one could interpret the references to his fasting and tithing as self-righteousness (v. 12). But if Jews kept the Law as a grateful response to God's saving mercy, maybe the Pharisee only refers to his obedience as confirmation of his gratefulness... Also, the opening line of the narrative ("He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt") may actually reflect Jewish covenantal nomism rather than legalistic self-righteousness.¹

Yinger's comments suggest at least three observations. First, Luke introduced the parable by noting that Jesus told it to "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (Luke 18:9; ESV; emphasis mine – asd). Trusting in oneself is obviously not the same as trusting in God's grace. Legalists trust in themselves. Observe that Luke did *not* say that these people "trusted in the covenant," as though they believed themselves to be saved by covenantal privilege. Note also that the Pharisee did not thank God for forgiveness of the sins of extortion, injustice and adultery, but rather that he was not "like other men." Of course, he was not an extortioner, unjust or an adulterer because he had obeyed God's law. Despite Yinger's assertion to the contrary, it is quite clear that he was "boasting in his self-achieved goodness."

Second, Jesus commented on the condition of the two men. He said that the tax collector

Bible Challenge Question

In his first epistle to Timothy, Paul mentioned two blasphemers by name. Who were they?

The answer to this question is on the back page.

[Concluded on page 4]